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ABSTRACT

This report was prepared to suggest ways in which community colleges might better serve the needs of minority and disadvantaged students through planning. It is the result of a national poll conducted by the project to identify the topics on which most respondents indicated a need for further information. Response to the poll was sufficiently large to indicate that there are certain 'key" concerns felt by community college persons across the U.S. These concerns will be discussed in individual reports, which, it is hoped, will provide the kinds of information that will be of help to those requesting it. (Author/SGM)

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THE NEW LEARNERS AND THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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A report of the
National Dissemination Project
for Post-Secondary Education

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FOREWORD

This report was prepared for the National Dissemination Project to suggest ways in which community colleges might better serve the needs of minority and disadvantaged students through planning.

The National Dissemination Project is an outgrowth of earlier projects funded or sponsored by the Office of Economic Opportunity to develop comprehensive educational services for the disadvantaged, and to provide institutional support in program development. One of its major missions is to provide information and assistance to planners and educators at the community college level, by responding to their requests for specific data and reports.

This report is the result of a national poll conducted by the National Dissemination Project, which identified the topics on which most respondents indicated a need for further information. The response to our poll was sufficiently large to indicate that there are certain "key" concerns felt by community college persons across the U.S. Each of our reports addresses such a national concern; and, it is hoped, provides the kinds of information that will be of help to those requesting it.

We would like to extend our special thanks to Dr. Raymond E. Schultz, and the graduate division of Washington State University, for their assistance in preparing this series of National Dissemination Reports. The work put in by Dr. Schultz's "team" on all these topics represents a distinguished contribution to knowledge on community college concerns.

The National Dissemination Project will continue until August 31, 1974 to provide information and assistance to help individuals, colleges and systems better serve the needs of students, primarily those classified as "non-traditional" and "disadvantaged."

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The New Learners and the Community College

Recently community college leaders have affirmed greater commitment to the open door policy, thus allowing new groups of learners to attain postsecondary education. In some important respects, these newcomers to higher education differ from traditional students. Just who these new learners are and what types of learning experiences they prefer forms the basis for this investigation. In addition, we will attempt to assess their present and anticipated numerical significance so that administrators may determine priorities for new learners' programs in relation to the total college curriculum. Finally, recommendations--based on an analysis of numerous articles and books about the new students--will be offered for adapting the community college to meet the needs of these students.

Before progressing with a discussion of plans for accommodating the new learners, we should define this term. Cross (1971), though a recognized authority, has adopted a needlessly restrictive definition of the new learners. In her best known book, Beyond the Open Door: New Students to Higher Education, she considered new students as those who score in the lowest one-third on conventional aptitude tests and characteristically earn Cs in high school. In contrast, the traditional college students usually earned As and Bs in high school. Unfortunately, instead of consistently defining new learners as those who demonstrate inferior achievement, Cross frequently characterized them

as less able. Granted, many new learners have failed to achieve the high degree of specific academic skills acquired by traditional students. Nonetheless, this situation does not necessarily derive from lack of abilities. Instead, unequal opportunity favoring the traditional students has probably been the major cause of inequality. New learners, if allowed commensurate opportunity, very likely could perform on an equal footing. We trust Cross has corrected such invidious labeling of the new learner in her new book Planning Non-Traditional Programs (1974), which was published too late for inclusion in this study.

It is certainly true that many new learners are less successful in dealing with the traditional educational process; and, for the purposes of our discussion, we refer to them as the academically underprepared. The nomenclator is borrowed from Losak (1973), who wisely asserted that this term carries a less pejorative connotation than disadvantaged, deprived, or remedial. The academically underprepared are students who have scored in the lower half on standard achievement tests or have attained a position in the lower half of their high school graduating class. Roueche (1968) has similarly defined this group of new learners in his informative book Salvage, Redirection or Custody? Remedial Education in the Community College. In his study, Moore (1970) typically referred to them as "high risk" students and noted that there are many more whites in this category then there are minorities. Thus, he concluded that programs for such students should not simply be directed to a single ethnic minority, but geared to the development of all academically underprepared students. Parenthetically we might add that this consideration leads

us to another pivotal term employed in this paper, developmental, which we use to represent programs previously called remedial and directed toward individuals whose academic skills fall below par. Administrators must be prepared to recognize the extent of academically underprepared students in the community college. As Holmstrom (1973) very recently found, nearly 50 percent of the college undergraduates who earned a high school grade point average of C+ or below are in two-year colleges. On the other hand 34 percent of these students attend four-year institutions, while only 18 percent comprise the university enrollment. As numerically important as the academically underprepared are to the community college, other kinds of new students are now attending.

Adults are another significant group of new learners considered in this study. Schroeder (1970) defined adult learners as those who "have either discontinued or completed their formal education but want to re-enter the educational process" (p. 39). Included are many women who are returning to school in increasing numbers. Many of the adult new learners attend community colleges part-time in non-credit courses. Some, for example those without an eighth grade education, are enrolled in Adult Basic Education courses, while others attend for job training or retraining or for personal interest. Recently rising attention has focused on the needs of the retired adult--yet another type of new learner in the community college.

Minorities, a third group of new learners, may fall into either or both of the above categories (academically underprepared or adult) but not necessarily. They too seek postsecondary education in greater numbers than ever before. Accordingly, minority needs have

to be taken into account by those determining the proper course for the entire group of new learners in the community college.

By now it has become axiomatic to comment upon the reversal of the growth rate in higher education. And few, if any, educators would be willing to predict that we will soon return to the golden days of the sixties when expansionism and optimism about prospects for higher education went hand in hand. Shell (1973) recently reported on today's modest growth statistics. According to her, the seventies ushered in a declining growth rate in higher education with only 7 percent increase in 1970. This was followed by a 4.1 percent increase in 1971 and only a 2 percent increase in 1972. The most recent statistics presented by Scully (1974) showed that the growth rate for 1973 rose slightly over the previous year, to 3.9 percent. However, most of that growth has taken place in community colleges which grew 9.4 percent, while enrollment in universities grew more slowly and actually dropped in four-year colleges. Undoubtedly the influx of new students is responsible for much of this growth; and as Roueche and Kirk (1973) have pointed out, future increases in community college enrollments will be "due to the development of effective programs for those who ordinarily would not attend college" (p. 94). Just how great will be the proportion of new students in the near future is difficult to pinpoint. Nonetheless, by piecing together projections by various scholars, we can arrive at a reasonable assessment.

Unhappily, few authorities are willing to make clear-cut estimates except in rather broad terms. For example, Medsker and Tillery (1971) asserted that soon significant numbers of academically underprepared

students will be coming to the community college. These same authors also projected the likelihood there will soon be as many adults in community colleges as there are young people just coming from high school. Similarly, the authors of the report for the Third International Conference on Adult Education (1972) sponsored by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization observed that the "stage is set for massive growth in adult education" in the United States during the seventies (p. 30). In addition, Cross (1971) reported that most colleges can expect the proportion of women to increase rapidly in the seventies. Further projections come from those who have carefully observed minority enrollments. They too predicted increased proportions. Cross (1971) is one authority who has recognized that this heightened interest in education by minorities derives from their perception that it enhances upward mobility.

Predicting increased numbers is of little value unless we know what proportion of total enrollment new students will represent. In a paper recently submitted to the ERIC Document Reproduction Service, Schultz (1974) has made some useful estimates. Based on analyses of past and current enrollment trends, Schultz projected that by 1975-80, 25 to 30 percent full-time equivalent students will be enrolled in developmental and personal interest curricula. These developmental programs, which he estimated would command about 8-10 percent of the enrollment, would be specifically for those we have labeled academically underprepared. Even this very modest projection, though undoubtedly accurate when based on prevailing trends, falls short of the real needs of these students. This is especially true when we take into account

estimates of observers like Moore (1971) who reported that 30 to 50 percent of the students entering open-door colleges are presently in need of developmental programs. Schultz also predicted that 15 to 20 percent of the new students will be in personal interest programs. Many will be adults attending on a noncredit basis for personal satisfaction.

Schultz further projected that 50 to 60 percent of the community college enrollment will soon be in occupational programs--the area which many new students find most amenable to their goals. Finally, we find from Schultz' assessment that only 15 to 20 percent of community college students will actually be enrolled in transfer programs by 1975-1980. This would be a striking contrast from the past when the main thrust of two-year colleges was to prepare students for transfer to a four-year college or university. Graziano, as recently as 1972, reported that 70 percent of the community college operating budget is allocated to transfer programs. Thus, if Schultz is correct, future allocations for these programs undoubtedly will be cut in the light of the projected increased emphasis upon occupational, personal interest and developmental programs.

Washington is one state which has responded to the new trends away from a disproprotionate concern for the transfer function. Winchester (1972) found the Washington State Board for Community Colleges and legislative mandates have directed that community colleges raise their occupation enrollments to 50 percent by 1980. Such a percentage, which is in line with the projections by Schultz, represents quite a reversal from the 1962 level when Washington community colleges enrolled 76.7 percent academic and only 14.1 percent occupational students.

Undoubtedly, leaders of community colleges nationwide will also want to redirect their programs in accordance with these changing developments. Attention should be paid to all three types of new students: the academically underprepared, adults, and minorities. Concurring in the belief that the academically underprepared should be acknowledged in curricular planning, Moore (1971) has stated: "If the administrator fails to establish equal priority for the developmental student as he does for the transfer or career student, he is in effect saying to that developmental student, you are less important than the transfer or the career student in this college" (pp. 127-128). We agree that greater emphasis should be placed on developmental programs for the academically underprepared. However, adequately determining the proper direction for their programs is quite another consideration which also should command our attention. Various scholars have studied the most suitable ways of addressing the needs of academically underprepared new students. For example, Roueche and Kirk (1973), after concluding that community colleges can meet the needs of these nontraditional students, noted that changes must be made in teaching technique. In their assessment, the lecture method may succeed quite well with highly verbal, traditional students. On the other hand, the academically underprepared, whose verbal skills are less well developed, have a more difficult time. Instead, Roueche and Kirk suggested a variety of teaching methods should be used. According to them, the best programs for these new learners are those which break down the course content into small, manageable tasks.

The use of measurable objectives and individualized instruction are other techniques favored by Roueche and Kirk, who also stressed the importance of student involvement in the learning process. Goddard (1973) also has recognized the effectiveness of individualized instruction for academically underprepared students. As he pointed out, such a technique should emphasize noncompetitiveness and be on a one-to-one or small-group basis. The stress on eliminating competitiveness is important because, as Cross (1971) pointed out, new students frequently feel shy and nervous in the typical competitive classroom. Individualized instruction does not always have to be on a faculty-student basis, as Roueche and Kirk (1973) found. In their study of several community colleges which have successful programs for underprepared students, these investigators saw the effective use of student tutors, who had previously completed developmental programs. According to Roueche and Kirk these programs were prospering because the tutors acted as "living examples of successful students" and, as peers, they could understand "the language, frustrations of the entering students." Additionally Roueche and Kirk observed that perhaps the most important consideration was that the tutors were able "to communicate openly and honestly" with entering students (p. 67).

Not only should techniques be altered, but some of the typical materials should be replaced for optimum learning by the academically underprepared. Cross favored the use of television, which would not carry with it the past associations of failure often associated with printed materials. Many other observers have similarly recommended such audio-visual devices.

A number of the same techniques and materials useful for the academically underprepared can also be effectively implemented in adult courses. Neff (1972) has suggested that variety of method is important in teaching adults. While lectures can be used successfully with adults (in contrast to the academically underprepared), Neff added they should be integrated with other techniques such as group discussion, recitation, demonstration, audio-visual materials, and field trips. This author cautioned that adult learning must be voluntary, satisfying, and free from the compulsion of formal education. Avoiding the restrictiveness of formalized study is something that should be likewise done for the academically underprepared. Another commonality unifying the needs for both of these groups of new learners is the importance of individualized instruction, which Neff and Minkoff (1972) advised for effective adult learning. Individualized instruction is especially important in Adult Basic Education programs. As Kreitlow (1972) has noted: "These new learners are found to need the word-by-word, phrase-by-phrase, page-by-page help that a teacher sitting down with them can provide. They also need the encouragement, support and the security of knowing that someone cares for them alone" (p. 92). Further Kreitlow acknowledged that at some time or another in their programs of continuous learning, most adults can benefit from individualized instruction. And, individualized instruction can incorporate the use of student tutors just as effectively as teaching the academically underprepared. Kreitlow is another of the many authorities who have advised that variety of method and materials be interjected into adult programs.

Another group of adults which we should further analyze is retired people because they have particular needs meriting attention by community college administrators. As Carlson (1973) observed, retired adults generally do not want courses for credit, but neither do they want hobby courses meant to merely keep them entertained. Instead, they have a variety of interests around which courses should be developed. Some of the popular courses for retired persons are: Health for Senior Citizens, Social Security and Other Benefits for the Aged, How to Enjoy Retirement, Conversational Spanish, and Arts and Crafts. Carlson recommended that an environment other than the typical classroom would be more suitable for older adults who cannot sit for long periods of time in hard chairs. Moreover, because transportation is often a problem for these people, classes should be held at convenient locations close to their homes. Additionally, scheduling should take into consideration the fact that many older people do not like to go out at night. In summarizing an assessment of the proper curricular approach for adults, we might refer to Neff and Minkoff (1972) who recognized that traditional pedagogical methods should be superseded by innovations for adults. And, we might add that such a direction would also benefit the academically underprepared.

Many of the methods and materials useful for the academically underprepared and adults can likewise be successfully employed with minorities. However, in the recent past we have seen the recognition of minority needs through the development of such special programs as Black Studies. Cohen and his associates (1971) acknowledged the importance of the community college Black Studies movement by

referring to a United States Office of Education survey which revealed that by the end of the 1969-70 school year 45 percent of the community colleges were involved in Black Studies. In summarizing the results of this commitment, Cohen and his associates saw that Black Studies helped illuminate the need for more Black administrators and instructors in the community college. This awareness alone, from the point of view of the Black community, is sufficient reason for recognizing the success of such programs.

Hobbs (1973) has provided some information about useful procedures for academically underprepared minorities, and personnel responsible for development of community college programs will be interested in her findings. Hobbs reported on a developmental program at Miami Dade Community College which relied upon interdisciplinary study in small groups with constant student feedback seeking to identify student progress. The reported attrition rate of 30 percent for this program is close to the overall average community college attrition rate and thus well above the 90 percent dropout rate normally found among the academically underprepared (DeCano, 1973). Such a factor alone suggests that this type of a program should be adopted more extensively not only for academically underprepared minority students, but for all students whose academic background has been neglected. Hobbs also favored individualized instruction with student tutors for minorities. Calling such a peer learning situation "contagion" learning, she observed that the tutors also learn through their teaching of others. The development of trust, which Roueche and Kirk (1973) mentioned in their discussion of peer tutors for the academically underprepared, is an important consideration in education for the

minorities. They need demonstration that is possible to succeed, and the example of peers who have previously prospered in the same program they are currently attempting certainly gives them positive reinforcement.

Although needs differ for the various groups of new learners, similarities outweigh differences. And, from the viewpoint of the administrator searching for the most effective programs for new learners, one basic similarity is especially worth noting. Generally speaking, all new learners primarily desire practical programs. Martorana and Sturtz (1973) in studying the academically underprepared stated: "There are strong similarities between the new student, whom Cross describes in considerable detail in Beyond the Open Door, and the occupational students in community college programs. Both view occupational education as a means of raising their status, of becoming more mobile in society" (p. 23).

Roueche and Kirk (1973) also asserted that practical, vocationally oriented programs are most suitable for the academically underprepared. "A community college with a strong college-transfer program and few occupational programs is not in a position to effectively serve non-traditional students" (p. 86). Based on an analysis of data she gathered, Cross (1971) has presented an effective summary of the most attractive college for new students who have relatively poor academic backgrounds. According to her, this college "is a friendly place where good teaching is emphasized and where faculty members take an interest in students. It offers courses clearly relevant to career preparation, stressing the development of skills over the manipulation of abstract concepts" (p. 77). Naturally, not all academically

underprepared students want occupational programs, as Cross also perceived. Continuing in her analysis, she suggested that the academically underprepared also may find a community college the only institution, because of its low cost (and, we would add, its lower admission requirements), where they can pursue traditional academic subjects. In Cross' assessment, colleges favored by the academically underprepared are very similar to the present better comprehensive colleges.

Considering our other categories of new learners, we find that adults and minorities likewise are primarily attracted to practical programs. In the case of retired adults, the reader might argue they would not be interested in attaining further job skills since they are already retired. Nonetheless, this does not preclude a desire for courses of a practical nature. A glance at the courses Carlson (earlier noted in this paper) found to be popular among these adults shows the opposite to be generally true.

For other adults, likewise, the term "practical" has taken on broader connotations. As Williams (1969) observed, some adults want degrees, while others want Adult Basic Education. Additionally, some want training or retraining as a "consequence of many occupational skills and the consequent need for refresher training or retraining for another occupation" (p. 4). For adults who are interested in career education, the National Advisory Council on Adult Education (1972) recommended that programs should encompass a broad base emphasizing knowledge and skill. With breadth of education a person can change fields more easily than with skill-based learning which is generally too narrow. Cross (1971) reiterated the importance of

revamping narrow vocational education which she believed could be just as limiting as narrow academic training.

Minorities too want practical programs but, like adults, may not always view them solely in terms of occupational training. However, because minorities often see education as a primary means of gaining upward mobility, they--like adult learners--will have their eyes on those programs (occupational, degree or developmental) which might allow the greatest opportunity for moving upward on the socio-economic ladder. In order to meet the needs of minority students, Moore (1971) has observed that administrators should pay attention to the specific ways individual minority students (Black, Chicano, Native American, Puerto Rican, Asian American) differ from traditional students. Further, he suggests just as much attention should be paid to these students as the administrators have traditionally given to honor students.

Another consideration helping new learners is elimination of punative grading procedures. As Roueche and Kirk (1973) observed, this practice does not necessarily mean that standards have to be lowered, for students simply may not be given credit until requirements are met; thus punishment with an F grade becomes unnecessary. Additionally, full college credit could be given for a variety of courses such as shop work and experience in industry (Cross, 1971). Along this same line, many authors have favored assigning full credit for developmental courses. Such a policy would help these programs become a more integral part of the community college curricula--something Moore (1971) favored.

Not only should adequate programs be set up for new learners, but faculty should be given in-service training in order to effectively implement these programs. Morrison and Ferrante (1973) have recommended this for teachers of minority students who are underprepared academically. Roueche (1968) advised that in-service training for teachers in developmental programs be provided at college expense. Aker (1965) also noted the importance of providing in-service training for teachers of adults. As he pointed out, most experienced teachers of pre-adults need a period of re-orientation in order to successfully prepare themselves for the teaching of adults. While we are on the subject of faculty vis-à-vis the new learners, we should also stress the importance of volunteer faculty in developmental programs. Roueche and Kirk (1973) adamantly emphasized that developmental programs should be conducted only by volunteers--one of the main points of their book. They deplored the practice of allocating courses in these programs to inexperienced instructors who viewed their assignments as a burden.

In determining the needs of all new learners, the administrator would be advised to take into account all the foregoing suggestions which fit his own particular situation. However, our study would be incomplete without consideration of further recommendations. Administrators who are attempting to provide services for the new learners might initially conduct a needs survey. Alfred (1973) has suggested that the sociological characteristics of the two-year college population needs to be determined by administrators. Such a procedure will, more precisely in Alfred's opinion, identify the needs of the people served by a given college. Carlson and Das (1973)

are two authors who have applied the concept of the needs survey more directly to the new learners. In fact, they have specified the necessity of determining the needs of the academically underprepared. According to these investigators, colleges have but infrequently tried to determine why these students have underachieved and often dropped out of school. Further, they contended that planning based on the outcome of a needs survey would greatly promote the success of students. We have also concluded that such needs surveys would help not only the academically underprepared but the adult and minority new learners too.

Once needs have been identified and proper programs established, the administrator has further obligations in evaluating programs. Roueche (1968) condemned the prevailing practice of intuitively evaluating programs in lieu of research studies devised to objectively determine their value. Following the establishment and evaluation of programs, college administrators are then in a position to go out and recruit students. As Roueche and Kirk (1973) have wisely asserted, no recruitment should be conducted until the former steps have been taken. Then administrators, in their recruitment campaigns should "make available, indeed publicize, data on retention and achievement" (p. 71). Further, Roueche and Kirk properly contended that the college administrators must use nontraditional means of recruiting new learners. Typical "college days" recruiting activities at high schools will not reach the adult population, for example. Moreover, recruiters should be familiar with the type of individuals being recruited (DeCano, 1973). Therefore, if the community college administrator wants to reach more ghetto residents (as Morrison and

Ferrante advised) then they should send only recruitment teams composed of individuals familiar with ghetto life.

While attracting and keeping the new learners in the community college may be a demanding task, the alternative of ignoring these individuals is hardly acceptable. As Circle (1973) has acknowledged, the community college will not grow significantly in the near future, unless it changes to meet the needs of new students. For example, if the community college does not modify its occupational programs, the proprietary schools may be appropriating increasingly high numbers of students. Glenny (1973) has observed that the Higher Education Act of 1972 will aid in the development of proprietary schools since the act provides financial aid directly to students who can choose the institution they want. Glenny believed many students are choosing proprietary schools because they judged them more oriented to their needs. And a factor worth noting is that the students most ready to attend these schools are the ones least able to pay. A recent article (Magarrell, 1974) describing a survey of 1,370 students in 29 proprietary vocational schools and 21 public community colleges indicated that the proprietary students were most likely to be from "minority and low-income groups and more likely to have dropped out of high school as general or vocational students" (p. 7). In analyzing the reasons students who could ill afford to do so chose proprietary schools, Wellford W. Wilms, director of the study, concluded that they avoided public vocational schools because they were too similar to the schools with which they had already had problems. Wilms further suggested that proprietary schools depend upon success by placing their students in jobs. He, thus, was

implying clearly that community colleges should likewise stress this service.

In our opinion, close attention should be paid to occupational programs, but not at the expense of the entire curriculum. Administrators of community colleges would be ill served if they became so engrossed in revamping the occupational programs that they neglected the less apparent, but changing, demands of the traditional academic curriculum. Surely a comprehensive and holistic approach, which gives proper recognition to the special needs of transfer, occupational, developmental, and personal interest programs is the best answer. Such an administrative course of action will best serve the new learners in their quest for a suitable postsecondary education, while at the same time satisfy the needs of more traditional community college students.

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